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Introduction: When John was commissioned to write Revelation, he was told by the Lord Jesus to "write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." (1:19). Thus there are three distinct components to the Book of Revelation. What John had seen at the point he had received the command was Christ revealed in His glory. And this is recorded in Chapter 1. The "things which are" describes the present of John's day; that is, the era of the church, an era we are still in today. We are still very much living in the era of the "things which are," making the teachings of the seven letters of Chapters 2 and 3 very important to us indeed!

Chapter 4 then commences the largest portion of the book: a description of "things which will take place after this." In fact, not only was John told this when he was commissioned (1:19), but it again announced as such in the beginning of this chapter (4:1). This theme - the theme of future things - dominates the rest of Revelation.

In Chapter 4, the scene abruptly shifts to Heaven. When there, in the Spirit, John sees God's throne, elders, angels, and eventually (in the next chapter), an innumerable throng of worshipers, and the Lamb who had been slain. Of particular importance to understanding the future is the presence of the elders, and then the vast multitude (Chapter 5) of the angelic host. Who are they? How did they get there? And when did get there? The understanding of this is critical to understanding some of the chronology of end-times events.

1. Verses 1-8a - A description of what John sees in Heaven.

- vv.1-2a - After these things... that is, the initial appearance of the Lord in Chapter 1 and His letters to the angels of the churches in Chapters 2-3. John saw a door... open and heard a loud voice calling him up to heaven. This itself is not prophetic - some have tried to identify it as the "Rapture" - but rather just a description of what John saw in the Spirit. What John sees, recorded in the ensuing verses, does seem to be the result of the "Rapture," however.

- vv.2b-3 - John sees God the Father on His throne. This is not the Lord Jesus, for He is seen as the Lamb in Chapter 5. It is not the Holy Spirit, for He is seen represented in the flames of the seven Spirits of God in v.5.

- v.4 - The twenty-four thrones and elders wearing crowns is best seen as representative of the church. Note from the cry of the living creatures in v.8 that this scene takes place before the return of the Lord, the Messiah, meaning Israel has not yet been redeemed and restored. The elders are not angels, and they are not Israel. Therefore they must be the other redeemed of the Lord, the church. This is most consistent with several things: 1) the church is elder-led; 2) the church had 12 original Apostles, and 24 is a multiple of 12; 3) the elders' crowns are consistent with descriptions of rewards for faithful

Christians given elsewhere in the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 9:25, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4); and 4) they praise God for their redemption in 5:9.

NOTE: Why is the church in Heaven praising God before the return of the Lord Jesus? The "Rapture," described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, has taken place by this point. Further note: the church is not seen on Earth after Chapters 2-3 in this book. This gives us a good, basic chronology of future events: the church is on Earth, serving the Lord (Chapters 2-3), then is seen in Heaven, having been caught up away from Earth, worshiping at God's throne (Chapters 4-5), then the "Great Tribulation" begins on Earth (Chapters 6-19) culminating with the return of Christ, then His kingdom is established for one millennium (Chapter 20), followed by the final judgment and all things being made new.

- v.5 - The seven Spirits of God represent the Holy Spirit in His fulness (7 represents completion, fulness, perfection, etc.).

- vv.6-8a - The resemblance to what was seen by Ezekiel in his vision is unmistakable! See Ezekiel 1:4-28.

2. Verses 8b-11 - A description of what will happen in Heaven, inaugurating tribulation on Earth.

- v.8b - Perpetual, angelic worship! The creatures' words are similar to what Isaiah reports hearing (Isaiah 6:3). Also, as aforementioned, note the lyric of praise: is to come. This is pre-tribulational, and pre-millennial.

- vv.9-11 - When the creatures worship, the elders do too. This is the church worshiping in Heaven! They have received crowns as rewards, and they use those crowns for worship, casting them before the throne.

NOTE: What are the angels and elders praising God for specifically? What do they have in common? They were created by Him. God created everything. Twice their praise mentions this! It is heinous, the assault that is happening in our world today on the truth that we are created by God.